

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Archdiocese of Denver**

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*North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.*

# Quality Assurance Review Report

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# About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

**Background.** Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In April 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools continuously improve.

**The Accreditation Process.** To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, school districts and their schools must:

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).
- 3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and recommendations to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's recommendations. The school district acts on the team's recommendations and submits a progress report following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness.

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# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

**Purpose.** The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and recommendations to improve the district and its schools.
4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school district is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

**School District Preparation.** To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school district and the community complete the AdvancED Standards Assessment Report. The report engages the district in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school district identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school district examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school district effectiveness.

**Summary of Team Activities.** The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified team chair and comprised of professionals from outside the school district. The team reviews the findings of the school district's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school district, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school district's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school district and its schools improve.

**The Quality Assurance Review Team Report.** Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the district. The report contains commendations and recommendations for improvement.

**Using the Report - Acting on the Recommendations.** The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the recommendations. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the recommendations.

**Accreditation Recommendation.** The Quality Assurance Review team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed at the state level and by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

## Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited Archdiocese of Denver on 10/25/2009 - 10/28/2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 46 administrators, 92 teachers, 4 support staff, 64 parents and business partners, 87 students, and 9 Board of Education members for a total of 302 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 9 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems with a school district and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review Team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district.

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

The Quality Assurance Review Team also examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team's findings in this area can be found following the standard reports.

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and recommendations that are provided below. The commendations and recommendations should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and recommendations.

## Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Archdiocese of Denver for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted. The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Archdiocese of Denver for:

- **The cultivation of a powerful and pervasive sense of Catholic identity within schools in the Archdiocese of Denver.**

Interviews with the Archbishop, pastors, principals, parents, students, teachers, and Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) administrators revealed an Archdiocesan-wide sense of pride in the distinctly Catholic character of Archdiocesan schools.

Catholic schools build communities of faith, evangelize, strengthen families, promote service, and develop responsible moral students to serve as examples of the living gospel.

- **The leadership and inspiration of the Archbishop, the superintendent, the associate superintendent, and school level administrators, in the formation of a culture of collaboration and empowerment across the Archdiocese.**

Interviews with OCS administrators, pastors, teachers, and stakeholders on all levels provided clear and convincing evidence for the presence of this organizational dynamic within the Archdiocese.

A collaborative culture, based on Catholic principles and values, fosters subsidiarity, builds community, celebrates diversity, encourages creativity, enhances quality relationships, enables children and adults to discover and use their unique gifts and talents and promotes excellence on every level.

- **The strategic branding initiative, built upon the four pillars, forms a foundation for the stabilization and sustainability of Catholic schools within the Archdiocese.**

Review of Archdiocesan strategic planning documents, branding research, local school improvement plans, as well as interviews with CSO personnel, principals, pastors, stakeholders, teachers, and support staff members provided clear and convincing evidence of the dynamic impact this visionary, proactive Archdiocesan initiative has made on the success and sustainability of Catholic schools.

The strategic branding initiative, based on sound research data, provides focus and direction for Catholic schools, ensures data-driven decision-making, expands the philanthropic and stakeholder base, and enhances the sustainability of Catholic schools.

## Recommendations

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following recommendations for improvement. The team focused its recommendations on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The Archdiocese of Denver will be held accountable for making progress on each of the recommendations noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these recommendations. The

district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the recommendations.

- **Design and implement a comprehensive development and communications strategy to provide schools with the resources, tools, assessment strategies, and support to take the strategic branding initiative from the stage of “acceptance” to “ready to defend and promote,” to “personalization, utilization, and internalization.”**

Interviews with principals, parents, stakeholders, and CSO administrators, validated the impact this strategic initiative has made upon the success and sustainability of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Denver, and also revealed the motivation and commitment to take this strategic dynamic to the next level of actualization.

A comprehensive development strategy, designed to promote self-sufficiency and to extend the philanthropic and stakeholder base, would cultivate a deeper understanding of the power and relevancy of the Catholic school experience, increase enrollment, and attract greater financial resources, allowing the Archdiocese to strengthen, support and nurture internal and external commitment to the success and prosperity of Catholic schools across the Archdiocese.

- **Replicate the qualitative brand development research study originally conducted in 2004 – 2005 to extend the brand development process for the Archdiocese.**

Interviews and review of planning documents and research data found that, in order to provide relevant statistical and anecdotal data to inform and inspire the ongoing success of the strategic branding initiative, the qualitative research study originally conducted in 2004 – 2005 should be re-administered.

By replicating the original study, the archdiocese would be able to statistically measure the impact of the initial branding initiative, and effectively measure the remaining “don’t know” barriers existing between Catholics who send their children to Catholic schools, Catholics who send their children to public schools, and Catholics who send their children to charter and independent nonpublic schools, as well as the perceptions of pastors with parish schools and those without. Data derived from a replicated study would also serve to provide current research-based messaging to effectively inform future communication and development strategies throughout the Archdiocese.

**Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools:** The team reviewed the district's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

## Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.

5. Following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

### **Resources**

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at [www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork](http://www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork), provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

### **Celebrating Accreditation**

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

### **Summary**

The accreditation process engages the school district, its schools, and community in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the commendations and address the recommendations noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school district to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

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# Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and recommendations presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and recommendations.

## Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

**Standard:** The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

**Description:**

The Archdiocese of Denver is committed to a purpose and direction that is shared system-wide. This purpose and direction is grounded in a unified commitment to a strong Catholic identity, which is clearly stated in their mission statement, “love for Jesus Christ, fidelity to His Church and commitment to the dignity of the human person.” Archdiocese educators “seek to assist parents in forming their children in moral and academic excellence.” Through interviews and a study of documents, the QAR team found evidence that the mission has been well-communicated to all levels of stakeholders. Parents, pastors and principals in particular stress their commitment to forming Catholic men and women who are the future of the Church and society. All stakeholders acknowledge the collaborative culture that exists within the Archdiocese. System-wide goals consist of non-negotiables, branding and a focus on student-centered learning that leads to a quality education and better product. The actions of leaders, both diocesan and local, develop commitment to the vision and work toward its sustainability.

Communications to parents and the community convey the importance of discipleship and the evangelizing mission of the Church. The message of discipleship begins with the visionary leadership of the Archbishop, the superintendent, and the associate superintendent. Their style of servant leadership, which is rooted in a belief in the importance of subsidiarity and shared leadership, creates a culture of collaboration and shared gifts. This is communicated through the development of leaders who are formed in programs that are modeled on the Gospel value of Catholic discipleship. Furthermore, teachers, administrators, staff members and students are encouraged to live their lives according to Gospel values.

Programs for students -- academic, extra-curricular and service -- are rooted in a profound respect for the sacred potential of each student, in mind, in body and in spirit. Decisions are made based on an understanding of current trend data relating to student achievement, student engagement, and student characteristics.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**

- Catholic identity and mission are well-communicated to all stakeholders.
- Catholic identity drives the vision and mission, which in turn provide the catalyst for all leadership formation, staff development, student achievement and strategic planning.
- Leadership formation fosters practices of collaboration and prudent planning.
- Development of the branding initiative generated the four pillars that drive strategic planning and has strong local buy in.
- Leadership at all levels holds common expectations with regard to Catholic identity, academic excellence, and enrollment management.
- The collaborative climate creates a culture of continuous improvement.

**Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Develop a communication strategy that addresses the dilution of the message of Catholic mission and vision beyond principals, teachers and key stakeholders.
- In order to measure progress and move to the next level, re-assess the current understanding of the Catholic identity, mission, academic quality, and branding initiative survey components. Of particular interest will be the “don’t knows.”

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

## Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

**Standard:** The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

**Description:**

The Archdiocese is fortunate to have the leadership and vision of the Archbishop, as well as clergy and laity who have provided guidance and foresight in the past and into the future. It is evident that much thought, planning, and prayer has gone into this accreditation process to insure a solid Catholic education for all children of the Archdiocese. It is clear that this process has begun under the inspiration of the Archbishop who in turn has entrusted the details of this work to the very capable hands of the superintendent and the associate superintendent. The QAR team found that these two individuals bring together vision, detail and precision. The team believes these gifts have enabled the Archdiocese to 1) prudently plan for and circumvent many of the harmful effects of the current economic crises, 2) effectively stem the declining student enrollment in Archdiocese schools, and 3) inspire and give confidence to the Presbyterate of the diocese to recommit themselves to the Catholic school as the most effective means of evangelization.

The QAR team believes that prudential planning in the form of the four pillars has been effective in preparing for and circumventing many of the harmful effects of the current and on-going economic crisis. The First Pillar of self-sufficiency seems to have already raised the consciousness of stakeholders as to the benefits of their local Catholic school. The branding initiative has proven to be very effective in getting the name of the Catholic Schools of Denver in front of the public. Interviews with teachers, parents, and

students revealed that branding has become a very common word. In one school, two teachers lightly commented that they were the “Brand Cops,” whose job it was to make sure that all documents going to the public had the correct brand of the school.

The Second Pillar of protecting the philanthropic base seems to have taken root in the warm relationships cultivated through the collaborative process. Parents speak of being included in the accreditation process versus in the past where the accreditation process was more confined to local administration. Several principals and parents said that this is now more of a diocesan effort, which has eliminated competition among schools to some degree and shared some of the prestige of well-known Catholic schools with other diocesan schools. In the words of one principal, “This process has raised all the boats in the harbor, not just a few well-known schools.” Publication of test scores has also raised awareness of the fine academic tradition that the Denver Catholic schools enjoy. Parents and students are happy to know their dreams are more real and attainable because of the excellent education they are receiving.

The Third Pillar of expanding stakeholder base is evident through the work of branding, but also through the work of tuition assistance. The QAR team was impressed to learn that one school was able to offer \$700,000 in tuition assistance to students so that all children wanting a Catholic education were able to realize their dream. This particular school has adopted the belief that no child will be turned away from a Catholic education because of money.

The Fourth Pillar of implementing strategic pruning has served several schools well in that it has enabled them to balance their budget, some for the first time in many years. In one case we learned that one school has reduced the number of classes per grade level from two to one so as to make the school operate as efficiently as possible. Certainly, this is a very painful thing to have to do; however, the result is that students are able to receive an education which far surpasses anything they could hope for if it were not for the local Catholic school.

The QAR team believes that effective governance and leadership has stemmed the decline in student enrollment. Looking at the 3-year snapshot from 2001-2004, 22 archdiocesan schools were experiencing a decrease in enrollment. In 2001-2004, declining schools ranged from a loss of 1% to 44% decrease in enrollment. Comparing enrollment data from FDE 2009-2010 with October 2008 enrollment data, 20 archdiocesan schools were experiencing a decrease in enrollment, with enrollment declines ranging from a loss of 1% to 18%. The numbers clearly indicate that the tide has turned and the decline has been stemmed as a result of prudent foresight.

The QAR team believes that as a result of the effective Archdiocesan leadership, the clergy have been inspired to “take another look” at the Catholic school as the most effective means of evangelization. This is evident in the support the Presbyteral Counsel has promised the Archbishop by agreeing to take on a parish tax for the support of all Catholic schools regardless of their location in the diocese. QAR team members were impressed with the pastors of the local parish schools who have so generously given of themselves to provide for the spiritual and temporal well-being of their flocks. We commend and encourage them in their dedication to the Catholic school in the third millennium.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**

- The Archbishop is committed to Catholic teaching and practices and serves as an inspiration and motivation for the clergy and laity of the diocese.
- The superintendent and associate superintendent demonstrate clear and purposeful resolve as they patiently and kindly move all stakeholders to greater and more meaningful commitment to Archdiocese schools.
- Archdiocesan leaders use a collaborative style of leadership which has been employed throughout

this whole accreditation process, motivating many to invest themselves more deeply into the mission of the Denver Catholic Schools.

**Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Seminarians and young priests should be given instruction and experience in Catholic schools early in their vocational journey to augment their confidence and skill in administering a Catholic school.
- Continued efforts should be made with regard to the Principal Formation Program, whether this be further developed locally or at the university level.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

## Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

**Standard:** The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

**Description:**

The Archdiocese schools have been brought into greater unity and academic strength by implementing plans that enact their mission to form students in moral and academic excellence. The Archdiocese engages in consistent review and updating of curriculum based on national standards and best practices. The guidelines are revised regularly and distributed by the Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) along with suggested texts to implement the curriculum design for practical implementation by each teacher. To ensure smooth and seamless flow of concepts, local sites work to assure school-wide alignment of student objectives. Additionally, to maintain quality instructional technology, the OCS, with a committee of teacher volunteers, revises the Technology Strategic Plan every three years.

Commitment to accountability is achieved by utilizing assessment tools such as standardized tests and the initiation of summative projects. The summative projects initiative, begun in the areas of language arts, health and science, shows great potential for more authentic and higher order assessment as teachers become more familiar and comfortable with the task. Students in 2nd through 8th grades take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and those in 5th, 8th, 9th, and 12th grades demonstrate their grasp of the teachings of the Catholic church through the Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE) test. The high schools also administer the PLAN test in 9th grade and ACT, SAT, and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. As these assessment results are being fully analyzed, the indication is that the curriculum is a reliable tool, producing favorable outcomes.

The OCS provides quality staff development opportunities and encourages local efforts to support high standards of teaching and learning in faith and intellectual development. Opportunities include retreats, catechetical formation, biannual diocesan teacher in-service, and instructional support in new initiatives.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**

- Well-qualified teachers, certified by the state and in the catechetical formation program, are appreciative of the high standards to which they are called and to which they subsequently call their

students.

- Students and educators demonstrate strong dedication and commitment to learning in a nurturing atmosphere of belief in dignity and potential.
- Schools use their available space to create a learning atmosphere that both challenges and attempts to address individual needs as much as possible.
- Stakeholders acclaim the reality of excellence and regret that more do not know and appreciate the treasure of these Catholic schools.

**Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Offer quality professional development opportunities that address differentiated needs of instructors on all levels, PK-12.
- Creatively seek to support efforts to meet the special educational needs of children whose families desire a Catholic education.
- Create and implement high-standard curriculum objectives and assessments with the valuable input of teacher practitioners.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

## Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

**Standard:** The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

**Description:**

The Archdiocese uses several standardized assessments. Elementary schools administer the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) to students in grades two through eight. High schools administer the PLAN, ACT, and SAT. It should be noted that students with special needs are included in testing, provided their exceptionality allows for such performance. In addition, all Archdiocesan schools administer the Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE) test to students in 5th, 8th, 9th and 12th grades. Additional assessments used at some schools include STAR reading assessments, DIBELS, and Accelerated Reader (AR) assessments. Teachers use data from these tests to encourage progress and diagnose student achievement.

ITBS scores are reported at the Archdiocesan level to principals, key stakeholders and advisory groups and are posted on the archdiocesan website. Results and analysis are reported to principals at the first meeting before school opens. Score interpretations are used at the Archdiocesan and local school levels to evaluate student achievement and organizational effectiveness. The QAR team noted that an air of collaboration exists between the OCS and principals in interpreting test scores. Evidence of this collaboration was present in principal interviews concerning documentation of data. The OCS models the explanation and use of the standardized test scores and encourages principals to do the same with their teachers. However, teachers expressed interest in additional staff development to enhance their understanding of this process.

The QAR team noted there is emerging evidence that schools are beginning to use test scores to measure

student progress on a grander scale rather than just for individual student profiles. In addition there is strong evidence that the Archdiocese of Denver uses a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**

- The use of Composite Quadrants, an archdiocesan-wide comparison of ITBS scores, ensures that student progress is being made at each school and in each grade.
- Curriculum is updated regularly, using teacher input for revising content and degree of difficulty.
- Summative projects are used to assess learning and compare student growth from year to year.

**Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Since grade equivalencies are subject to misinterpretation, consider using national percentile ranks (NPR) or Stanines when interpreting scores for stakeholders.
- Provide opportunities to educate stakeholders about the use of standardized testing to change and improve instructional practice, thereby enhancing student learning.
- Investigate opportunities for professional development, addressing the use of disaggregated test data as a means of analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of student performance.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

## Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

**Standard:** The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

**Description:**

The OCS actively participates in numerous teacher employment fairs for the purpose of recruiting, prescreening, and maintaining a centralized database of qualified candidates for principals to use. The Archdiocese provides induction programs for new instructional and administrative personnel that incorporate the participation of trained teacher and principal mentors. The OCS further assists schools in securing qualified personnel by maintaining their status as a provider for the Alternative Teacher Licensure Program. Interviews with principals and teachers and review of documents confirmed the effectiveness of the induction and mentoring programs and the responsiveness of the OCS to expressed needs. Recognizing future Archdiocesan needs for qualified, mission-driven principal candidates, OCS developed and implements a principal formation institute, which enables qualified teachers to advance their careers. Interviews with teachers in the program applauded the efforts of the OCS leadership in training them to become the future leaders of Catholic schools.

OCS provides teacher and principal performance review processes; evaluations are completed annually. The implementation of a walk-through observation process is a recent effort designed to strengthen teacher observation and performance reviews. Principals received training in this process. Interviews confirmed an appreciation for this new approach and revealed the benefits that had been realized in efforts to improve

the quality of instructional programs.

Teachers indicated that the OCS is helpful in ensuring their ongoing professional development. Contracts allocate nine days for these activities. Principals and teachers confirmed the quality of the multiple professional development opportunities that are offered both within the schools and on an Archdiocesan level. School leaders and instructional personnel recognized the positive impact these programs have had on improving the quality of education within the schools.

Principals repeatedly expressed their appreciation for the OCS's support, the leadership's fostering of a community spirit and collaborative culture, and willingness to provide them with the tools needed to improve the quality of educational programs and ensure the future viability of their schools. Archdiocesan leaders utilize a variety of measures to determine a school's viability (i.e., school/parish participation in the OCS-sponsored initiatives and programs; condition of parish facilities; and the ability of the parish to improve its physical plant; and reviews of parish and school budgets). Funding for capital improvements and facility renovations is not included in the budget. OCS merely offers the school and parish advice on budgetary matters. The Archdiocesan strategic branding initiative is rooted in sound research data and provides focus and direction to the schools. The branding platform is designed to facilitate data-driven decision-making, to expand the philanthropic and stakeholder base, and to enhance the future viability of Catholic schools.

A variety of monetary grants are awarded to schools; these grants provide funds for salary and tuition assistance and school improvement efforts. Schools that qualify for federal programs are encouraged to secure resources that will address the special learning, social, and emotional needs of their student populations. Interviews with principals and teachers in the qualifying schools confirmed that guidance, assistance, and support are provided by the OSC with respect to securing additional educational and financial resources. The OCS recognizes its limitations with directly impacting the use of financial resources on the local level and its ability to respond adequately to students with special learning needs. Pastors and principals acknowledged that shifts in particular community demographics present them with additional challenges.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**

- The Archdiocese uses multiple recruitment and training methods to assist local school leaders in their efforts to employ qualified teaching and administrative personnel who are committed to the Church's mission.
- Archdiocesan leaders have developed and foster collaborative relationships with other Archdiocesan office personnel, in particular with the parish finance office and the chief financial officer, modeling and encouraging replication of this culture of cooperation and communication among local parish/schools.
- Archdiocesan leaders pursue ongoing efforts to provide school and parish leaders with the tools needed to improve the quality of education and ensure the future viability of the institution.

**Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Strengthen the culture of collaboration by designing and implementing a comprehensive development and communications strategy that continues to provide schools with the resources, tools, assessment strategies, and support.
- Research educational alternatives and provide support to schools with their efforts to respond to the needs of special education students and the diversity of cultures within their communities.
- Provide practical and meaningful professional development opportunities that address differentiated needs of instructors at all grade levels, K-12.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

## Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

**Standard:** The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

### Description:

The QAR team finds that the Archdiocese fosters collaboration among stakeholders and designs strategies that enhance understanding of the mission and encourages dialogue within the community. This is clearly evident by the Archdiocesan-wide branding initiative which addressed in a measured and systemic way the attitudes of stakeholders. Stakeholders were engaged in focus groups, participated in informational meetings, and responded to surveys. The results of these efforts were used to develop guiding principles and pillars which have the consent and support of the community.

In review team visits and interviews there is a consensus among parents, teachers and students that the Archdiocese and local schools are transparent and that they, as stakeholders, have a real part in the support of learning in the schools. This participation takes many forms, such as parent involvement in local Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) and School Advisory Committees (SAC) to local opportunities to volunteering with the schools. Students and parents understand themselves to be ambassadors for their schools and work in collaboration with faculties and local administrators as partners in education.

### Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Stakeholders noted with pride that the OCS is present in local communities to share information through Parent Information Nights, to provide training for local SACs, and to encourage transparency in the schools.
- Bringing the branding resources and personnel to local schools helps to address local issues and enables all schools to be strengthened.
- Local schools are enhancing communication through newsletters, web sites, email, and other media as ways to share good news from classrooms and enhance the transparency of the school to stakeholders.
- The ability to share school goals, test scores and curriculum has empowered stakeholders.

### Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop strategies to reach parish feeder schools and create a sense of ownership for schools in all parishes who feed into schools.
- Create initiatives to break down barriers that have been identified for "don't know" responders in initial data-gathering and continue to monitor this information.
- Create continued support for local schools by offering templates and Diocesan support to local marketing and development efforts.
- Continue to provide resources and networking within the Archdiocese to support local communication efforts and maintain the high level of buy in for the branding efforts. This must be continually revisited as communities invite new stakeholders and experience continued growth and

renewal.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

## Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

**Standard:** The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

### Description:

Extensive branding initiatives undertaken by the Archdiocese have provided all stakeholders with a common vision and language for continuous improvement. Yearly reviews of individual school mission statements by local SACs encourage each individual school to continually align its mission with that of the Archdiocese as school stakeholders review components of student learning, Catholic identity, and school improvement. The OCS requires that each principal identify yearly goals that address professional competence, student learning, and school improvement, in addition to five non-negotiable goals that are identified by the OCS. The goals become components of the yearly principal performance review.

A yearly report of the progress of the school improvement goals is requested by the OCS. Schools have been divided into eight cluster groups for the purpose of the district self-study and, while not yet fully implemented, these QAR clusters have been formed to monitor the progress of school improvement goals. As the process becomes more developed and functional, this peer monitoring should serve to encourage schools in their efforts toward meeting school improvement goals.

The annual reviews, comparisons and analyses of standardized test scores for individual schools and for all Archdiocese schools, provide the data necessary to drive instructional decisions. By tracking growth and achievement, areas of instructional strengths and weaknesses are identified and plans to address these areas are developed. Professional development for Archdiocese and school personnel are also informed by this data as instructional techniques, effectiveness, and school improvement are addressed. The OCS sponsors educator conferences every two years, and the Living Faith Catechetical Conference is held yearly for teachers. In addition, principals are required to provide staff development at the local level based on the needs of their school faculties. Interviews with principals and teachers speak to the effectiveness of these external and internal accountability measures.

Regular teacher-driven review and revision of the Archdiocesan-wide curriculum helps to ensure that each school's continuous improvement plan is aligned with the Archdiocesan vision and expectations for student learning. Using guidelines and recommendations from national subject area groups, as well as identified best practices of the Archdiocesan school faculties, these processes provide opportunities for collaboration and engagement of teachers across the Archdiocese. Teacher interviews revealed that a strong sense of ownership for the curriculum was evident among the teachers.

The OCS provides the schools with the necessary leadership and support to engage in continuous improvement. Interviews with the superintendent and the associate superintendent revealed a strong commitment to the advancement of schools and the school system in the Archdiocese of Denver. Realizing

the challenges these schools face and the efforts required to handle those challenges, OCS leaders serve as valuable human resources to all school administrators as they provide the tools needed to succeed. Once direction and resources have been provided, administrators are held accountable, which only serves to strengthen the education provided by Archdiocesan schools.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**

- Branding initiatives have provided all stakeholders with a common vision and language that promote continuous improvement of education in Archdiocesan schools.
- Annual review and analysis of standardized test scores to measure achievement and growth drives instruction and informs professional development decisions.
- Regular teacher-driven review and revision of the curriculum ensures expectations for student learning are current and research-based.
- Incorporating school improvement goals into the principal performance review serves to emphasize the importance of continuous improvement.

**Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Replicate the qualitative branding research study to provide current and relevant data which can be used to measure progress and inform next steps.
- Develop and initiate a comprehensive Archdiocesan professional development plan that is responsive to teacher needs and includes differentiated instructional strategies that address students with special needs and the needs of the changing population in the schools.
- Extend the commitment to continuous improvement by all school personnel and define how continuous improvement is related to continued employment.
- Continue to strengthen the budgeting process, development initiatives, and enrollment management efforts at the school level to promote the financial self-sustainability of the schools and provide the financial resources needed for continuous improvement.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Archdiocese of Denver has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

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# Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

## Description

The OCS annually gathers and compares data from all schools on enrollment trends, faculty and student demographic data, standardized test scores, and curriculum compliance. Schools are visited annually by the associate superintendent, and principals have a yearly performance review which includes input from pastor, teachers, and the OCS. Schools are required to record their progress on improvement goals. OCS collects these reports for analysis each spring.

Quality Assurance review school clusters, comprised of four schools per cluster have been assigned. These clusters include the principal and one teacher leader from each school in the cluster. These eight representatives comprise the QAR visiting team. One person from each cluster will be trained as the visiting team leader. The leadership will rotate among the participants until all the principals have been trained. Each team will yearly visit one school in the cluster on a rotation basis until each of the four schools has been visited. At the end of four years, the clusters will be reconstituted. The Archdiocesan QAR teams use the AdvancED protocol for Standards Assessment Reports (SAR), Quality Assurance Review (QAR) visits, and Accreditation Progress Reports (APR).

Clusters are responsible for the summative project rater-reliability for summative projects from cluster schools. Cluster groups also review the diocesan improvement goals to assist schools in developing local improvement objectives and metrics to help the Archdiocese meet its overall goals. Schools are required to submit their school-level goals, including school-specific objectives and metrics. Clusters and the OCS will review the goals. Progress on these goals will be monitored by clusters, site visits, and OCS review. Goals will be published to the stakeholders, and surveys will be conducted by the OCS every two to three years to track external perception of progress. Results are used by the OCS to evaluate past efforts and plan for future activities.

## Strengths

- The OCS gathers and compares data annually from all schools on enrollment trends, faculty and student demographic data, standardized test scores, and curriculum compliance.
- The AdvancED standards are part of the non-negotiable benchmarks in the branding initiative.

## Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

- Create and implement evaluative measures and feedback loops to provide the OCS accurate and timely information regarding the ability of the Archdiocesan QAR process to provide accountability and oversight at the school level.
- Archdiocesan teachers and administrators continue to participate in QAR reviews outside of Archdiocesan boundaries to access best practices from others schools and districts.

## Conclusion

The commendations and recommendations in this report are designed to focus the school district on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and system effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and recommendations only have meaning when acted upon by the school district and its schools. The strength of this report lies in the school district's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school district is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified several recommendations for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to Richard L. Thompson and Elizabeth Youngs, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through NCA CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Eddie Krenson, Chair (AdvancED)
- Dr. Mary Keeley, Vice Chair
- Mrs. Cristiana Carter, Team Member
- Mrs. Francine Conway, Team Member (Catholic Diocese of Richmond)
- Dr. Kathryn Wood, Team Member (Queen of Angels Catholic School)
- Father Lawrence Stoley, Team Member (Lincoln Catholic Schools)
- Ms. Patricia Burbach, Team Member (Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph)
- Mrs. Sheila O'Leary, Team Member
- Sister Jeannine Norton, Team Member

## AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

The AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As school districts reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org).

### **Vision and Purpose**

The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

### **Governance and Leadership**

The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

### **Teaching and Learning**

The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

### **Documenting and Using Results**

The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

### **Resource and Support Systems**

The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

### **Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

**Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.